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ABSTRACT

This study examined the conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria of 9th- and 12th-grade teachers and administrators. Four representative members of each group (n=12) were interviewed and asked to identify and define indicators of instructional practice based on the context of their allocated roles and experiences. It was hypothesized that conceptions of the criteria for teacher evaluation would vary according to the interviewed subjects' organizational positions as teachers or administrators. Variables were constructed from the responses of those interviewed and entered into a principal components analysis. Inspection of the scree plot and eigenvalues revealed three components that accounted for 68% of the data. Ninth-grade teachers, twelfth-grade teachers, and administrators differed in their conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria. Ninth-grade teachers focused on management and discipline issues. Twelfth-grade teachers emphasized content material and student achievement. Administrators noted that teacher commitment and general instructional behaviors and skills were important attributes to consider for evaluation. (Contains 2 tables and 17 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Conceptions of Teacher Evaluation Criteria:

A Principal Components Analysis

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Abstract

The proposed study examined ninth and twelfth grade teachers' and administrators' conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria. Four representative members of each group (N=12) were interviewed and asked to identify and define indicators of instructional practice based on the context of their allocated roles and experiences. It was hypothesized that conceptions of the criteria for teacher evaluation would vary according to the interviewees' organizational positions (e.g., ninth or twelfth grade teachers, and administrators). Variables were constructed from the responses of the twelve interviewees and entered into a principal components analysis. Inspection of the scree plot and eigenvalues revealed three components which accounted for 68 percent of the data. Ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, and administrators differed on their conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria. Ninth grade teachers focused on management and discipline issues. Twelfth grade teachers emphasized content material, and student achievement. Administrators noted that teacher commitment and general instructional behaviors and skills were important attributes to consider for evaluation.

Introduction

Although teacher evaluation criteria are most prevalently derived from research on effective teaching, to date there is no codified body of knowledge that theoretically, or empirically defines effective teaching (Haertel, 1990). Researchers and practitioners concur that most sets of criteria cannot adequately represent the features of competent performance across disciplines and across grade levels (Sykes, 1990).

Based on the Theory of Evaluation and the Exercise of Authority (Dornbusch & Scott, 1975), conceptions of the criteria will vary according to reference group and organizational position. As an example, ninth and twelfth grade teachers serve student populations with distinct characteristics (early and late periods of adolescence). Administrators, on the other hand, have different organizational concerns and represent traditional roles as evaluators.

There is a heightened recognition that teaching may be a phenomenon that cannot be adequately described without taking into account the views of those involved in the local educational organization (McLaughlin, 1990). The notion that evaluative criteria should be set and defined at the local level is consistent with the view of effective teaching as a multi-dimensional, value-bound and socially constructed endeavor (Good & Mulryan, 1990). A model which more closely approaches the reality of effective teaching would comprise an array of conceptions derived from the constituent sources within an

organization (McLaughlin, 1990).

Researchers suggest that stakeholders in the process must have a common understanding of clearly articulated criteria (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Personnel, 1988). Nevertheless, although 'Defined Role' guidelines offer notable suggestions for deriving and establishing relevant criteria, absent are guidelines for post facto means of determining whether the criteria, once established, are indeed relevant to the population, and whether evaluators and evaluatees have similar conceptions of the criteria. As clearly delineated as the criteria might be at the onset, without provision for measuring whether the conceptions of criteria are similar, differential interpretations and misconceptions are not only likely, but are to be anticipated.

Externally imposed criteria of teacher evaluation may not reflect the views of the constituents within a particular school (Haertel, 1990). Individuals' experiences within a specific school context influence their views of what constitutes "good" teaching. These experiences affect individuals' conceptions of valid indicators of teacher performance. Rather than using externally derived criteria, alternative methods that rely on individuals' experiences and conceptions within a specific school may generate more valid indicators of teacher evaluation.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria varied across different organizational positions (ninth grade teachers, twelfth

grade teachers, and administrators). Individual representatives from each of the three organizational groups were interviewed; through these interviews, conceptions were gathered and compared within and across organizational positions. These individuals provided descriptions of what they perceived to be fundamental teacher evaluation criteria. Each group (ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, and administrators) serves different populations, which generates different experiences across the three groups; these unique experiences were expected to influence divergent perceptions of teacher evaluation criteria across the three groups.

This study addressed the following questions:

1) What are the criteria deemed important by constituent groups within one secondary school?
2) Are there differences across administrators, ninth grade teachers, and twelfth grade teachers in the conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria?

Methods

Sample

The sample consisted of 12 educators in one rural secondary school in upstate New York. These 12 educators were comprised of three different groups: ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, and administrators. Within each grade level, teachers from different content areas were interviewed. Administrators included one principal, one recently retired principal, one assistant superintendent, and the dean of students.

Interviews

Focus group and individual interviews were conducted by one researcher. Focus groups consisted of ninth and twelfth grade teachers. The intention of these focus group interviews was to obtain a broad range of ideas pertaining to teacher evaluation criteria. Individual interviews were conducted with four ninth grade and four twelfth grade teachers. These eight teachers had also been interviewed in the focus groups. The in-depth interviews were conducted to gather more specific information. Administrators were interviewed individually, and did not participate in the focus group interviews.

Data Analysis

Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. These data were entered into QSR*NUDIST, a qualitative data management program. Two coders examined the data, categorized the individual responses, and assigned codes for each category. All individual responses were subsequently coded according to the specified categories, and the two raters established consensus. The categories were then collapsed according to similar themes.

In order to address whether ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, and administrators differ as to their beliefs regarding the criteria that should be used to evaluate teacher performance, we created three dummy variables. For each of the three variables (ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, administrators), we coded one of the groups as "1" and all the rest as "0".

The data were entered into principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Recently, Pruzek and Lepak (1992) demonstrated the plausibility of using principal components analysis in an exploratory fashion when conducting multivariate research with small samples. In addition, Guadagnoli and Velicer (1988) concluded that components with four or more loadings above .60 can be viewed as reliable. They also reported that for a wide range of sample sizes, results meeting that condition may be considered generalizable. A review of Table 2 shows that our results meet the conditions stated by Guadagnoli and Velicer.

Results

Results of an initial analysis with all variables included showed that three of the variables had extremely low loadings and communalities. While these variables were considered to be theoretically important, we chose to eliminate them, because they could not be considered to be reliable. Those variables included statements that referred to: 1) types of accommodations teachers make for students; 2) whether or not teachers consciously attempt to engage all students regardless of gender or "at-risk" status; and 3) whether the teachers' concept is that of facilitator or instructor. Thus, the analysis consisted of 14 variables (See Table 1).

Table 1

Variables Derived from Interview Data*

Variable	Statements
Teachers' general instructional behavior & skills	"Teachers have them redo assignments."
Teachers' satisfaction and comfort level	"Teacher smiles frequently."
Teachers' demonstrated knowledge of subject matter	"Teachers make subject matter relevant."
Teacher communicates goals & expectations	"Teachers clarify expectations to students."
Teacher uses different types of questioning	"Teachers ask students to explain their point of view."
Teachers' use of materials and media	"Teachers use resources, not just paper and pencil, board work within one lesson."
General classroom management	"Teachers make the environment supportive and focused on being successful."
Specific classroom management skills	"Teachers are concerned that students are prepared as they enter the classroom."
Observable management techniques	"Teachers are ready with materials for students."
Policy and procedures related to discipline	"The number of referrals teachers make to office."
Specific ways of implementing discipline	"Teachers use remediation periods after school."
Student achievement levels; methods of assessment	"Students are better at what they are doing after the activity than before."
Evidence of teacher commitment to school & student	"Teacher participates in extracurricular activities."
Student comfort level and rapport with the teacher	"Students initiate questions."

*Note. Statements from each variable category were tallied.

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The remaining 14 variable were entered into a principal components analysis. Inspection of the scree plot and eigenvalues revealed three components which accounted for 68 percent of the data. Table 2 summarizes the varimax rotated loadings of each variable on the three components. Variables with a loading of .50 or higher were used to interpret a component. Each component is described below.

Ninth Grade Teachers Management and Discipline Orientation

The following six variables defined the first component: specific management skills, general management skills, observable management techniques, teacher communicates goals and expectations, specific ways of implementing discipline, and policies and procedures related to discipline issues. The results indicate that ninth grade teachers were likely to consider these variables to be important as evaluation criteria. In contrast, the negative direction of the loading for twelfth grade teachers indicates that they would not view these variables as necessary evaluation criteria.

Twelfth Grade Teachers' Student-Focused Skills, Content, and Achievement Orientation

Loading on the second component were the following variables: student's achievement level and methods of assessment, student comfort level and rapport with teacher, teachers' use of materials and media, teachers' use of different types of questions, teachers' knowledge of subject matter, and teachers' general instructional behaviors and skills. Twelfth grade

teachers, the only group clearly identified with this component, would tend to emphasize these variables as important evaluation criteria.

Administrators' Teacher-Focused Skills and Commitment

This third component included variables which administrators were most likely to consider as important evaluation criteria. These variables included teacher's general instructional behaviors and skills, evidence of teacher commitment to the school and students, and level of teacher satisfaction and comfort. Ninth grade teachers were not likely to consider these variables to be of concern as evaluation criteria. Interestingly, administrators do not consider policy and procedures related to discipline issues as important evaluation criteria, while ninth grade teachers do consider these issues important.

Table 2
Rotated Factor Loadings for Interview Variables

VARIABLE	FACTOR 1	FACTOR 2	FACTOR 3
Ninth Grade Teachers	.57	-.14	-.60
Twelfth Grade Teachers	-.62	.62	-.22
Administrators	.05	-.47	.82
General Classroom Management	.86	.05	-.24
Specific Classroom Management Skills	.75	-.20	.35
Observable Management Techniques	.69	-.11	.30
Teacher Communicates Goals & Expectations	.78	.01	.08
Specific Ways of Implementing Discipline	.83	.24	.08
Policy and Procedures Related to Discipline Issues	.61	.24	-.52
Students' Achievement Level & Methods of Assessment	-.55	.50	-.34
Student Comfort Level & Rapport With Teacher	-.02	.77	-.15
Teacher use of Material and Media	.00	.77	.01
Teacher Use of Different Types of Questions	-.07	.74	-.09
Teacher Demonstrated Knowledge of Subject Matter	.17	.71	.32
Teacher's General Instructional Behaviors & Skills	.28	.51	.53
Level of Teacher Satisfaction & Comfort	.14	.07	.77
Evidence of Teacher Commitment to School and Students	.12	-.02	.81

Note.

Factor 1= Ninth Grade Teachers' Management and Discipline-Oriented

Factor 2=Twelfth Grade Teachers Student-Focused; Skills, Content, and Achievement-Oriented

Factor 3= Administrators are Teacher-Focused; Orientation Toward Skills and Commitment

Discussion

According to the data, ninth grade teachers, twelfth grade teachers, and administrators have different conceptions of which criteria are important indicators of teacher performance. Teachers perceive students in ninth and twelfth grades differently, and thus their instructional emphasis will differ across these two populations. Administrators, on the other hand, want assurance and concrete evidence that teachers are adequately performing their roles. These different groups deal with different populations, and therefore their experiences influence their instructional focus.

Ninth Grade Teachers

Ninth grade teachers in this study indicated that structural components of their teaching were the most important indicators of effective teaching performance. The six components identified comprised management, structure, and discipline issues.

Ninth grade students are in early adolescence, and their developmental level may necessitate that teachers use a consistent, organized classroom approach. Early adolescents who enter ninth grade experience the "top-dog" phenomenon, which means that they have changed from the top position in middle school to the least powerful position in high school (Santrock, 1996). These transitions which occur in early adolescence may be more disruptive than changes that occur either earlier or later in adolescence (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983).

Piaget (1972) stated that adolescents are in the formal operational thought stage; they begin to think abstractly, ideally, and hypothetically. With the onset of formal operational thought, early adolescents begin to think idealistically, and they may overtly demonstrate their dissatisfaction with issues and individuals who do not measure up to their ideals.

Another characteristic of adolescence is egocentrism, which refers to an adolescent's feeling of uniqueness; adolescents feel that others are as interested in them as they are themselves (Elkind, 1978). Early adolescents are particularly self-conscious about others' perceptions, and this egocentrism contributes to the display of surface behaviors (Santrock, 1996). Teachers who deal with young adolescents, therefore, may feel the need to focus on controlling the display of overt behaviors. Teachers who focus on structure may help them achieve balance and develop consistency in thought.

Teachers have the potential to influence the social and cognitive development of early adolescents. This was demonstrated by statements made by ninth grade educators about the important elements of teaching students at that level. Erikson discussed the potential impact adults have on adolescents:

"The strengths a young person finds in adults at this time- their willingness to let him experiment, their eagerness to confirm him at his best, their consistency in correcting his excesses, and the guidance they give him- will codetermine whether or not he eventually makes order out of necessary inner confusion and

applies himself to the correction of disordered conditions. He needs freedom to choose, but not so much freedom that he cannot, in fact, make a choice (Erikson, 1960)."

Twelfth Grade Teachers

As opposed to students in ninth grade, by twelfth grade many of these issues have been resolved. Early adolescents use abstract reasoning to think ideally about social issues, thus creating idealistic rebellion (Rice, 1996). By late adolescence, however, students have had ample experiences to compare to their ideals, and adolescents become more tolerant and understanding. Egocentrism which is present in early adolescence gradually diminishes (Elkind, 1978)). Teachers can then become more involved in curriculum, rather than focusing on the development of the students (Cowan, 1978). This is consistent with this study's findings. Twelfth grade teachers expressed more concern for subject matter, student rapport, presentation techniques, and analytical assessments that required more abstract thought. These teachers were no longer predominantly concerned with students' unpredictability and capacity for misinterpretation.

Administrators

In contrast to teachers, administrators have a different perspective of what criteria demonstrate effective teaching. Administrators identified indicators that reflected teachers' behaviors, rather than student-focused behaviors. The three criteria found to be important to administrators included general instructional teacher behaviors and skills, level of teacher

satisfaction and comfort, and teacher's commitment to the school and students. These three indicators are observable criteria, and may reflect the administrator's role of ensuring that teachers overtly demonstrate behaviors that can be identified by observers. Administrators did not consider policy and procedures related to discipline as pertinent evaluation criteria. One plausible explanation is that administrators may not regard issues related to discipline as a central component of a teacher's role; they may consider discipline as an administrative responsibility.

Implications

Because this study was conducted in one school, replications should be undertaken to determine if representative groups in other schools have similar conceptions of teacher evaluation criteria. In addition, other grade levels (e.g., tenth grade teachers, eleventh grade teachers) should be studied for purposes of comparison. Further studies could also investigate schools with diverging theoretical orientations (e.g., magnet schools, humanistic schools, residential schools, etc.) to determine if conceptions of the criteria are influenced by the theoretical orientation of the school.

When evaluating teachers, the grade level of the students should not be overlooked. According to this study, emphases will vary according to the grade level of the students. Therefore, criteria valued as important by the evaluator may not be judged important to the evaluatee. The two important actors in the

process may be operating according to two disparate standards. How does one measure a construct when the participants do not agree on the definition of the construct?

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